

Toddlers' social behaviors in response to helping/hindering displays

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From very young ages, children are able to correctly interpret others' social intentions. Kuhlmeier, Wynn, & Bloom (2003) tested this ability in 12-month-old infants. The infants saw several movies showing a ball struggling to climb up a hill. In some movies the ball was "helped" up the hill by another shape. In others, a different shape "hindered" the ball by pushing it down the hill. After becoming familiar with these two events, children saw the ball either move toward the "helper" or the "hinderer" shape. A third video presented all three shapes. The ball could either move toward the "helper" or the "hinderer" shape. Children's looking-time duration was significantly longer when the ball moved toward the "helper" shape, than it was when the ball moved toward the "hinderer" shape. Based on the duration of the child's looking-time, this study suggested that 12-month-old infants could recognize goal-related action and predict future actions of an actor based on behavior they had previously seen. The current study is an extension of this work. We want to examine whether children produce social behaviors (e.g. pointing, frowning, smiling, referencing the parent) while watching these social displays.

Typically-developing toddlers (N = 20, 8 males; M = 23.6 months; SD = 3.02 months) participated in a replication of the Kuhlmeier et al. (2003) study. We video would record the child while he or she is watching the display. We have developed a scoring scheme to investigate what social behaviors children produce while watching these displays. Data collection is in progress. Understanding what social behaviors typically-developing children show in this context could help us develop a screen for children with autism, a developmental disability which is marked by deficits in social interaction (Wilson, Hansen, & Li, 2011).

(keywords: toddlers, autism, developmental disability, social interaction, behaviors, theory of mind)